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Beyond Metropolises: Hybridity in a Transnational Context

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The political and economic forces fueling such crimes against humanity—whether they are unlawful wars, systemic tortures, practiced indifferences to chronic starvation, and disease or genocidal acts—are always mediated by educational forces.

Henry Giroux, *America on the Edge*

Hybridity discourses have undergone sharp criticism in academia, and one finds many of these criticisms in literary and cultural studies¹ postcolonial theories² and in the postcolonial and global studies.³ This paper attempts to critique hybridity discourses from an interdisciplinary perspective. Thematically, it explores how bilateral relations within a transnational context are impacted by hybridity discourses. It examines how the relationship between a developing country and an imperialist one is impacted by hybridity discourse and shows how certain kinds of knowledge production in academia can have disempowering effects on countries vulnerable to neocolonial intervention.

This paper locates the nature of epistemic violence embedded in the postcolonial hybridity discourses and investigates their relationship with certain issues of development and environmental justice in a country like Bangladesh. Since the worst sufferers of epistemic violence are “third world” countries, as their intellectual, cultural, and physical spaces carry the toll in the form of “brainwashing,” cultural bankruptcy, and economic-environmental manipulation by IMF/World Bank policies, this paper considers mainly the issues of Bangladesh while alluding to similar crises in other Asian and African countries.

Hybridity in a ‘Flat’ World

“In the hands of academics that rarely understand or concern themselves with the reality of the world, works of literature are eviscerated and destroyed,” says Chris Hedges.⁴ This is true not only about many English professors, but also about many pedagogues in other disciplines in the “third world” countries busy to recycle theories and ideas from abroad, many of which get complicit with the militarization of knowledge and with the projects of the Military-Industry-Academic complex in the corporate global economy. But an intellectual dependency on others to define the interests of the “third world” countries is no less distressing than the systemic manipulation of these countries within the neoliberal global capitalist economy since the 1950s. Despite the neocolonial disempowerment of these nation-states, certain

social theories assume an increasingly “flat world” and find the neoliberal and neocolonial manipulation of some nation-states by others as a myth.⁵

In contrast to these theoreticians, Homi K. Bhabha finds the world as “uneven,” but inspires the minoritarians to seize the present, the cracks and fissures in it.⁶ As a postcolonial theoretician, Bhabha offers certain tools and tactics to the minoritarians so that they can reconfigure and accelerate their social mobility as they must transcend and go beyond polarization of identities along any self/other binary.

In this article, I argue that these tactics for the minoritarians do not serve their best interests. To do so, I identify Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, especially its ways of cross-cultural exchanges, as bereft of any understanding of the biopolitics of power. Therefore, it becomes irresponsible to the interests of the people vulnerable to neoliberal management of differences across the world. It remains shockingly indifferent to the (mal)distribution of life chances for the colonized in both home and host countries.

The article has four parts. Part I outlines and theoretically engages with some of Bhabha’s key concepts: nationhood, hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, sly civility, etc. Part II focuses on the use of hybridity in literature and cultural theorizing. Part III goes back to Bhabha’s concept of nationhood and explains how it remains indifferent to manipulation of one nation by another. Part IV concludes the article and argues for a radical revision of the theory of hybridity.

The Politics of Hybridity: Metropolitan Metaphors

As examining cross-national exchanges would be an important aspect of the present paper, it would be helpful to outline Bhabha’s understanding of nationhood.⁷ Bhabha complicates identity formation claimed by nations. For him, a dominant narrative of nation overpowers the identity of minority groups in that nation. However, it is not that he rejects national identity entirely; rather he wants to keep such identity open. He uses his concept of “uncanny” to complicate the division between Western and non-Western identities.

For Bhabha, the nation must be perceived within the double movement of “pedagogy” and “performance.” As he says:

We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical “objects” of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse, an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the “subjects” of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.⁸

On the one hand, the pedagogy tells us that the nation and the people are what they are. On the other, the performativity keeps reminding us that the nation and the people are always generating a non-identical excess over and above what we thought they were. Bhabha thinks that even the pedagogical is caught up in this logic of the performative. The apparent stability of pedagogical statement is actually caught up by the need to endlessly restate the reality of a nation constantly exceeding its definition. The consequence is a familiar blurring of apparently polarized categories. The performative thus introduces a temporality of the “in-between.”⁹ As a result, the polarity of the pedagogical and the performative is constantly blurring. So, the pedagogy is never as stable as it wants to be, and the performative itself becomes pedagogically important.

To examine Bhabha’s nationhood, Bhabha seems to establish the dialectic between the pedagog-

ical and the performative, between time and space, between past and present. But even this dialectic—though theoretically value-free or scientifically objective—only gets complicit with the manipulation of one nation by another in cross-national exchanges. Part III of the paper will illustrate the issue. But I argue that Bhabha could have avoided the problem if he incorporated the issue of “being” along with time and space much like Edward Soja’s theory of spatialization as Soja argues:

[W]ith an informed postmodern politics of resistance and demystification, one can pull away the deceptive ideological veils that are today reifying and obscuring, in new and different ways, the restructured instrumentalities of class exploitation, gender and racial domination, cultural and personal disempowerment, and environmental degradation.¹⁰

I argue that Bhabha’s theory of hybridity should be revised in a way much like what Soja implies. He should bring back the experience of people with their everyday life struggles in an “uneven” world. He should develop better tactics to negotiate the unequal power relations that shape the world in a much more polarized way than he thinks.

Bhabha may complicate the binary Western/Non-western in his concept of nationhood but, to me, however, Said’s orientalism¹¹ is still a very powerful tool to resist consciously or unconsciously misleading understandings of people of once colonized culture. Bhabha, of course, finds it monological, as it confirms the rigid binary of the ruler and the ruled.¹² For Bhabha, colonial discursive practices are heterogeneous and ambiguous. Hence he proposes a theory of hybridity or the “third space”:

[...] all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. [...] the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.¹³

In his proposed hybridity, Bhabha ushers in formation of a merging, a commingling of cultures and identities with their distinctive features. Bhabha—in his formation of hybridity and third space—takes extra caution to remind us that his “third space” is not like the frenzy of a multiculturalist melting pot, but a space in which cultural transactions or translation is an ongoing process to keep going with much required practice of negotiation of meaning and identities. As he says:

To that end, we should remember that it is the “inter”—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of meaning of culture [...] And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of ourselves.¹⁴

To Bhabha himself and his peers, the third space is undoubtedly a site of subversion, free from Said’s binary thinking. Bhabha foregrounds it as a threshold for a transnational culture subverting the binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized. The cornerstone of Bhabha’s theory is his much repeated argument for intercultural transaction or intercultural translation occurring in a new spatial turn, a self-othering process.

This paper intends to show how Homi K. Bhabha’s hybridity discourse misinforms the masses and tends to trap them within the grid of neocolonialism which, ironically, they fight against. Bhabha’s “hybridity” or “third space” as a ground of negotiating intercultural affinities is considered as a marked turn in postcolonial literary theories, but I argue that it depoliticizes the ideological struggle of the people

in ex-colonies vulnerable to the constantly renewing tricks and strategies within the interlocked grids of neocolonialism and neoimperialism.

I argue how an easy acceptability of hybridity discourses paves the way for developmental policies for third world countries imposed by the neoliberal tryst of developed countries, their pet corporations like IMF and World Bank, and corrupted governments in third world countries like Bangladesh. The present paper emerges from this anxiety and undertakes an attempt to consider the task of examining certain developments within postcolonial theories, development discourses, and environmental justice discourses and their reception/application in countries like Bangladesh.

This paper argues that hybridity discourse is anything but innocent, abstract theorizing, though some critics (Benita Parry, Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and Bart Moore Gilbert) may popularize this view:

Critics like Spivak and Homi Bhabha may well be 'devotees' of earlier poststructuralist thinking, but their work is distinctive because it illuminates the path out of dark and cabalistic writing by poststructuralism's high priests.¹⁵

I argue that a productive and material critique of Bhabha's hybridity should go beyond the broad sweep, an accusation of poststructuralist ambiguity. It should figure out several things: what theoretical intervention does it want to bring in as it critiques and departs from Said's colonizer/colonized binary? Bhabha may argue against the politics of polarizing and for emerging as others of ourselves, but has this appeal been merely a cover for those who do practice the politics of polarizing? If so, what theoretical insight might Bhabha offer to negotiate with this manipulative strategy?

To start off, though postcolonial theories are supposed to inspire understanding of the ongoing manipulation of people of ex-colonies, Bhabha, in his concept of hybridity, cannot provide any tools to resist such manipulation. Bhabha's concept of ambivalence delinks itself from historicity. His "sly civility" dissipates or dispels "dissent" from "civil disobedience" practiced by Gandhi or Thoreau. Bhabha rather transforms it into consent as the only option, beyond which the colonized subjects supposedly cannot stretch their political imagination. A popular currency of this manufactured consent inspires some countries like Bangladesh to accept contracts against her own interest. I would show this by giving examples of agreements signed by Bangladesh and the US.

Bhabha does not consider that any uneven power relation may affect the constant becoming he proposes. Bhabha formulates and fixes a pattern of postcolonial resistance which does not entertain any other modes of resistance than what gets filtered through ambivalence: the double consciousness of the colonized hovering between, on the one hand, submission to authority but with a difference—that is, submission on one's own terms; on the other, acquiescence (consent) in authority as given.

Thus, the "self-othering" has taken an ironic twist which is bereft of any anticolonial agency. The kind of resistance Bhabha's "sly civility" allows is not enough to negotiate uneven power relations involved in such cross-cultural exchanges. The cultural translation that Bhabha propagates, and as often occurs practically, becomes a dangerous move for people in developing countries as it tells them to merge apolitically. In its ushering of transnational culture, it stands out as just another version of the politics of neoliberal multicultural management of differences which Bhabha would claim his theory confidently resists by going beyond it in the "third space," but this is far from true, since the theory of the "third space" is indifferent to the fact that the process of cultural translation or negotiation practically occurs in an intensely contested space conditioned by ideological underpinnings "in which power operates in the guise of a universal ethics of cultural exchange and solidarity."¹⁶

In his proposed "self-othering" or "alterity," Bhabha inadvertently reinforces an abstract liberal humanism, which, ironically, was the cornerstone of the British colonialism many third world countries

went through. The same zombie has been resurrected to shape global neocolonialism in and through the neoliberal capital management controlled by the developed countries and some supranational institutions that prioritize the interests of the powerful nation-states of the global North. How the discourse of liberal humanism has been used as a bait to impose problematic deals and contracts between Bangladesh and the US can be used as an example. Bangladesh has signed a dozen or so agreements with the US.¹⁷ The terms of these contracts reflect the unequal power relationship which Bhabha's call for intercultural affinities carefully suppresses. The details of agreements (some signed and some in the process of being finalized), like SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement), HANA (Humanitarian Assistance Need Assessment), PISCES (Personal Identification, Secured Comparison and Evaluation System), or the latest TICFA (Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement), were never made public.

SOFA essentially provides immediate clearance to US military personnel to enter the country at any time, without anything being asked about the accompanying troops or weapons. Another deal, signed in 2003, whose details were revealed a month after it was finalized, states that no US soldier or personnel can be tried for any crime in a Bangladeshi court or handed over to the International Criminal Courts for trial. They get indemnity not only for committing crimes in Bangladesh, but they can come and take refuge after committing crimes in other parts of the world.

According to newspaper reports on PISCES (Personal Identification, Secured Comparison and Evaluation System), the Bangladesh government will cooperate in all possible ways to protect the security interests of the US if the US identifies any Bangladeshi citizen or group as possible terrorist suspects, even at the cost of human rights violations. Meanwhile, in the name of scientific and technological cooperation, Bangladesh has given Americans access to sensitive information.

The terms of all these agreements were dictated by the US. Was it really in the best interests of Bangladeshis to sign these deals? If Bangladeshi policy-makers did indeed think that, why were these agreements never made a matter of public debate? Anyone would see how these contracts give privileges to the US over Bangladesh: Bangladesh would provide sensitive information to the US, which is not bound to give any such information to Bangladesh; Bangladesh must allow unconditional entry to US soldiers while the US will not give the same privilege to Bangladesh; Bangladesh has given consent to the US's need, if any, for human rights violations but for Bangladesh such requirement is even unthinkable.

Thus, such contracts show how intercultural exchanges sacrificing nationalistic concerns become unprivileged communication for "subject countries" of the "new" empire and hybridity discourses act like catalysts in such unprivileged communication. Bhabha argues that by practicing hybridity "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of ourselves."¹⁸ But the question is, who is eluding this practice of polarity and who sticks to it more and more? Bhabha's theory does not consider these practical aspects; neither does it interrupt the imperialist forces by offering any vision for eluding this polarity. This is perhaps the reason why hybridity discourse has been popular to neoimperialist forces as they officially re-inscribe the pattern of hybridity in their attempt to boost the always expanding global corporate economy.

Why this "practical" issue like US foreign policies should be examined in terms of postcolonial discourses can be perceived from Gauri Viswanathan. In an interview, Gauri Viswanathan said "South Asian Scholars need to remind themselves that their contributions don't lie simply in developing postcolonial theory but in turning literary criticism into a practice."¹⁹ She takes postcolonial as a method and appreciated Said using this method in *Culture and Imperialism* to read canonical English texts. In addition, Viswanathan has done another excellent thing: specifying the meaning of the term "postcolonial," which in its current use has achieved a kind of ambiguous multiplicity like the term "postmodern." But one needs to specify it in a direction which is most useful, as she aptly does:

Postcolonial is a misleading term because it assumes, first of all, a body of knowledge or a specifiable period of time after colonialism. It is sometimes used interchangeably with “decolonized”... I might define Postcolonial Studies broadly as a study of cultural interaction between colonizing powers and the societies they colonized, and the traces that this interaction left on literature, arts, and human sciences of both societies. But in its more popular usage, I suppose, “postcolonial” has come to signify more or less an attitude or position from which the decentering of Eurocentrism may ensue.²⁰

While I certainly agree that decentering of Eurocentrism should be a task of a postcolonial critic, I would argue that some versions of postcolonial theories and their reception/application have not done this sensibly. In the backdrop of much contested interaction between colonizing powers and the ex-colonies, the postcolonial hybridity discourse inspired by Bhabha and his peers, for example, de-historicizes and depoliticizes the interaction. While Bhabha’s hybridity turns out as privileged communication for imperialistic forces, environmental discourses, it also—as I would show—serves their neocolonialist interests.

This politics of polarization is what Bhabha finds problematic in Said’s orientalism. He proposes his concept of hybridity or third space to go beyond this polarization. But the politics of polarization in its manifestation is more nuanced than Bhabha thinks. In fact, it can be often invisible to the privileged, as they cannot see any evidences of it in their everyday life. Philomena Essed’s understanding of everyday racism can be an eye-opener:

Everyday racism can be more coded (a white teacher saying to an African-American student: “How come you write so well?”); ingrained institutional practice (appointing friends of friends for a position, as a result of which the workplace remains white); and not consciously intended (when lunch tables in a canteen or cafeteria are informally racially segregated and the white manager “naturally” joins the table with the white workers where only they will benefit from casually shared, relevant information and networking).²¹

Bhabha’s peers may argue that to destabilize this politics of polarity Bhabha does offer something in his concept of ‘mimicry.’ I would critically examine this claim. To define mimicry, Bhabha says:

[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.²²

As Bhabha argues, colonial discourse wants the colonized to be extremely like the colonizer, but by no means identical. If there were an absolute equivalence between the two, then the ideologies justifying colonial rule would be unable to operate. The colonizer assumes that there is a structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all. Bhabha intends to puncture the colonizer’s claim or assumption of superiority by relying on the slippage of meaning through which the colonized achieves their agency.

The agency is gained through not only rupturing the colonizer’s discourse but, also in the transformation of the colonized into an uncertainty which re-creates the colonial subjects in and through their constant oscillation between equivalence and excess. This constant movement makes the colonized both reassuringly similar and also terrifying, as Bhabha says: “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.”²³ This sounds revolutionary only at the expense of disposing most colonized people. That is, Bhabha re-

duces the social to the semiotic; his hybridity is shaped by difference and remains lavishly indifferent to the capitalistic management of differences. As Ahmad rightly points out, Bhabha may call for constant becoming but does not consider that “most individuals are really not free to fashion themselves anew with each passing day, nor do communities arise out of and fade into the thin air of the infinitely contingent.”²⁴

To defend Bhabha, Huddart argues that Ahmad has misunderstood Bhabha’s notion of cultural changes and hybridity, as Huddart alleges that Ahmad has decontextualized Bhabha’s arguments. “Some people hold on to cultural forms in an attempt at survival,” Huddart argues to imply that, just because of those people’s attitude to their cultural forms, Bhabha’s notion of non-polarized plays of identity creation does not become invalid.²⁵

But Huddart, like Bhabha himself, carefully evades the fact that there must be some material reasons behind people’s reluctance in playing such a wonderful and gratifying hybridity game Bhabha has invented. In other words, for Bhabha and his peers, the actors or participants of hybridity live in an ‘open’ space and ‘flexible’ present, as Bhabha argues:

Hybridity is a form of incipient critique; it does not come as a force from ‘outside’ to impose an alternative *a priori* ground-plan on the pattern of the present. Hybridity works with, and within, the cultural design of the present to reshape our understanding of the interstices – social and psychic – that link signs of cultural similitude with emergent signifiers of alterity.²⁶

For Bhabha, an understanding of power relations in the present and applying tactics of resistance within the existing power relations are what hybridity as a form of critique invites all to get engaged with. Such a stance would logically be possible only if Bhabha assumes that all minoritarian actors are equally capable of practicing tactics of alterity in a given time and space.

If asked, he would have responded that it is not about the capability of actors but their possibility of gaining new kinds of agency that he wants to consider. Surprisingly, this is the exact stance which the neoliberal multicultural prophets would like to preach, as it helps them to make people believe in the trickle-down effect of open market policies and the rhetoric of neoliberal management of differences. It looks like Bhabha keeps his tactics open to get them hijacked by neoliberal multiculturalists, but when they actually do the hijacking, Bhabha begins a dramatic mourning:

The hostile takeover of hybridity by the discourse of neoliberal globalistas is a case in point. Hybridity, in our global moment, has become a ubiquitous form of cultural universalism, the proper name of a homogenizing pluralism. Hybridity is the celebratory sign of diversity and mixedness that figures prominently on the calling-cards of globalisers who believe that the earth is flat, markets make the world go round, and that the Internet highway gives us all common access to the New Jerusalem. The economic and cultural ‘ecosphere’ that accompanies this global perspective insistently points to the large-scale, boundary-crossing landscapes we live in. Our global cities are multicultural; our nations are part of larger transnational regionalities; our *sensus communis* is hardwired through digital connections; our sovereignty is ceded to global multinational corporations, the World Bank, the IMF.²⁷

This drama of eating cake and having it too does not offer us any progressive stance for empowering minoritarians. Bhabha, for example, critiques “any politics of polarity”, but is totally reluctant to consider practicality: who is pushing the politics of polarity and for whose interest he desires to drive it off from the colonized subject’s conceptual frames.

In short, his form of resistance in his concept of ambivalence is no resistance at all. It is resistance

only rhetorically that serves the colonizer's need to show a façade of balance of power in a supposedly democratic and just society. In this regard, Radhakrishnan raises an interesting question about the value Western society gives to certain kinds of hybridity: "For example, why is it more fashionable and/or acceptable to transgress Islam towards a secular constituency rather than the other way around? Why do Islamic forms of hybridity, such as women wearing veils and attending western schools encounter resistance and ridicule?"²⁸

Bereft of the question of "being," of people grounded in different contexts of capabilities, Bhabha does favor the neoliberal capitalist and people who have the privilege of gaining social mobility in the "present." Bhabha may preach all his tactics as hybridity or some forms of alterity and resistance, but people keen on investing privilege for their own material benefit have long known them as moves of conformity to and convergence with the more powerful culture.

After decades of proposing hybridity and upon its celebration and critique, Bhabha himself evaluates the impact of this concept, as he reflects: "We have come together to celebrate a concept – the hybrid – that has established its salience in a wide range of discourses relevant to the aesthetics of cultural difference and the politics of minorities."²⁹ In the face of such self-congratulating moves, I argue that hybridity has favored some minoritarians at the expense of abandoning others.

People living in the "periphery countries" of the global economic map carry the toll of non-polarized politics inspired by social theories like one proposed by Bhabha.³⁰ Even when these people move to the core countries with high hopes for better economic opportunities, they become victims of hybridity politics until they also evolve into predators. I will briefly illustrate this in the following.

Bhabha's tactics of resistance are basically cultural performances. He recommends non-confrontational acts like "mimicry" and "sly civility" in the face of systemic discrimination against minoritarians. For the "bottom billion" of the world, for the homeless or transgendered people in the US or for the impoverished people in the global South, non-confrontational acts reinforce discriminations against them.³¹ For the rest, however, these may work, given that they are capable of getting assimilated in the mainstream culture.

This partial success, however, is the greatest failure of non-confrontational tactics. Eventually, tactics like these would pit the impoverished people and the "bottom billion" against the relatively capable masses. It creates cultural convergence and assimilation in which capable minoritarians join the majoritarians. This is hybridization at the expense of worsening miseries of minoritarians, as it keeps structures of discriminations intact and offers fissures and cracks only to people who can seize and thrive on them. Rich Asian-Americans in the US, for example, dissociate themselves from newly arrived poor immigrants from Asia. The former calls the latter "Asian Flacks" and thus helps reinforce stereotypes about the latter.³² Bonilla-Silva refers to Saito and affirms:

[M]any Asians have reacted to the "Asian flack" they are experiencing with the rise in Immigration by fleeing the cities of immigration, disidentifying from new Asians, and invoking the image of the "good immigrant." In some communities, this has led to the older, assimilated segments of a community to dissociate from recent migrants. For example, a Nisei returning to his community after years of overseas military service told his dad the following about the city's new demography: "Goddam dad, where the hell did all these Chinese come from? Shit, this isn't even our town anymore."³³

In the example above, rich Asian-Americans are replicating white flights while affirming their preferred racial alignment towards ethno-racial groups who rank above their own. New and poor immigrants would require time and resources to reap material benefits from cultural performances and politics of

hybridity. Bereft of any other forms of resistance, they are left with non-confrontational moves, urged to find their preferred racial alignments or to use Bhabha's tools "sly civility" and "mimicry," anyways. But the return from their investment in these would also rely on all multiple intersectional vectors: race, class, sex, gender, ability, and others. In this way, Bhabha's big claim that hybridity offers some tools to empower minoritarians is simple and naïve at best. It must be complicated and evaluated within various contexts of cultural exchanges.

Thus I agree with Ahmad³⁴ and Hardt and Negri³⁵ that the postcolonial subject Bhabha ushers in is expected to assume a particular brand of identity: someone having access to resources. That this subject cannot be perceived within the vectors of race, class, sex, gender, ability, etc. substantiates the fact that this subject has been taken as a male, bourgeois onlooker whose ideology would favor "an elite population that enjoys certain rights, a certain level of wealth, and a certain position in the global hierarchy."³⁶ Hardt and Negri aptly comment on the postcolonial discourse: "[D]ifference, hybridity, and mobility are not liberatory in themselves, but neither are truth, purity, and stasis. The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of production. Truth will not make us free, but talking control of the production of truth will."³⁷

In the next section, I examine how hybridity discourses have been received in the transnational literary and cultural representations.

The Aesthetics of Hybridity: Literary and Cultural Exchanges

One site of hybridity discourse involves practicing literary criticism—translating the dominant representational modes to portray others by westerners and, ironically, by "others" themselves. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin mark how European literary criticism is ethnocentric, as they argue, "The washing out of cultural differences becomes a prominent effect of European literary criticism, since some appeal to the essential humanity of readers has been constructed as a function of the value and significance of the literary work."³⁸ Reading great authors of the west has been prescribed for the others as a means to achieve universal human values where "European" equals "universal." Overall, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out: "European texts—anthropologies, histories, fiction, captured the non-European subjects within European frameworks which read his or her alterity as terror or lack."³⁹

I would argue that, along with European texts, the tradition of literary criticism in the form of recycling and reproduction of ideas from Western critics virtually forecloses any scope of considering the cultural contexts of the non-European others in the academically approved responses to English canonical literary texts. Some versions of the postcolonial literary theories appear in the scene with little help, as will be argued in this section.

Representations of Europe to itself and the representations of others to Europe were not accounts of different peoples and societies, but a projection of European fears and desires masquerading as scientific or objective knowledges. By the same token of objective knowledge, the West promotes and prescribes environmental policies for the "third world" countries, but those policies are incongruous and often harmful for the "third world countries," as the recommended and often imposed policies are segregated from contextual conditioning of those countries. This would be the focus of the section III, but it is important to question the perceived notion of objectivity in such transnational exchanges of ideas and policies.

To un-hijab this illusion, I would like to examine the use of hybridity in literature, because I believe that the 'third space' discourses in academia, especially in English departments, prepares the ground for intellectual and emotional acceptance of neoimperialist drives, trends, desires in a way that creates an elusive world in the minds of the people living in developing countries—and these people con-

sider an entrance to this illusive world as a step towards “progress.”

In her book *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization*, Jaina C. Sanga celebrates Rushdie's application of hybridity as revolutionary. In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, she identifies William Methwold, the toupeed Britisher, as an icon of hybridity. She argues:

Yet Methwold himself, despite all his Englishness, uses Indian words and phrases in his communication with the Sinai family; and Ahmed Sinai, in the presence of an Englishman, talks in a voice that “has become a hideous mockery of an Oxford drawl.” Thus both Englishman and Indian have picked up the characteristics of each other's cultures; it is in this clash or collage between British and Indian, between Western and Eastern, that the notion of postcolonial hybridity is best articulated.⁴⁰

If this playful linguistic exchange is celebrated as hybridity, it does so at the expense of occluding many important questions of ideological, socio-economic, socio-historical, and socio-political underpinnings that often determine the relation between Western and Eastern. This at best can be called dress-change identity, which is done not only seriously, but only at the interpersonal level for fun.

Dipesh Chakrabarty in his essay “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” observes how Linda Hutcheon in her celebration of hybridity in Salman Rushdie tends to be biased towards the West:

Though Salem Sinai [of *Midnight's Children*] narrates in English ...his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled: they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, film, and literature, and, on the other, from the West—*The Tin Drum*, *Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and so on.⁴¹

Chakrabarty rightly observes that Hutcheon handpicks references only from the west and is indifferent to take responsibility to mention Indian texts, and this is one typical way how hybridity in literary criticism has often been celebrated. But this undoubtedly is one-sided, which can be called favoritism-hybridity or biased hybridity. Moreover, this strategic bias makes it easy to accommodate Rushdie in English departments, as Chakrabarty believes.

This can be called “dress-changing” or “showcasing hybridity” performed at a casual level, cutting off all political threads as if they simply do not matter. Such a hybridity at best is wishful reverie of the elite diaspora intellectuals; at worst, it is their alibi of entry into the elite club of the Western academic intellectuals. At best, Bhabha's hybridity is immensely theoretical and, due to its indifference to historicity, highly deceptive.

How the so-called cultural transaction or translation actually occurs can be found in the representational tropes of the Western media reinforcing orientalist fantasy. To exemplify this, I would like to mention two recurrent motifs to represent the oriental people: hijab and homophobia.

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar argues how the West imposes homophobia on oriental people in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, and some other countries and equates homophobia with barbarism in an attempt to justify war on terror.⁴² To deflate this homonationalist ideology, Puar shows the presence of gays in Iran and Palestine who are also struggling for their rights just like their counterparts in the US and UK do.

As for hijabs, the Western media in their “cultural translation” overlooks cultural differences and equates hijab with the torture of women by men, bondage, and lack of freedom, and argues the best

way to liberate them is to bomb their husbands and children. Western media's rhetorical tropes to read the East are often found in contract with neoliberal multiculturalism, which also justifies War on Terror. This cultural transaction or translation in Western media can be called neoliberal hybridity.

From the literary scene, this neoliberal hybridity can be illustrated from cultural transaction in Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*.⁴³ Nafisi shows how a group of Iranian women are under surveillance in their country because of their penchant for canonical texts of English literature and how they consider that their entry and cultural adaptation or adjustment to the United States may improve their intellectual and hence their overall lives. Nafisi reads Iran in American eyes, and this is hugely supported both in western academia and media as this goes with the official neoliberalism. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* depicts Iranian Muslim women desiring to become more like James's American girls in way that manufactures a will for US sponsored liberation of women in Iran. In her role as native informant, Nafisi makes us think about the unevenness of the biopolitics of global capitalism where codes for racialized and gendered difference compose an assimilative multicultural order that makes US global hegemony appear just and fair.

This pattern demonstrates neoliberal Multiculturalism's deployment of racialized and gendered difference to produce the global multicultural citizen as a privileged racial subject. In other words, these literary projects appropriate cultural authority or epistemic privileges of women of colors' feminism while hollowing out its epistemological and political project.

In such cultural translation what comes out as a stark reality is the politico-economic interest of the West to read the East. Bhabha and his peers may overlook this political economy of cultural translation, basking in the ivory tower of abstract liberal humanism, but that does not do any good to the subalterns. The only purpose it may serve is for the elite diaspora intellectuals like Spivak, Bhabha, and Azar Nafisi, who can be alleged as the cultural agent of neoliberal multiculturalism, the official principle of American neo-imperialism and neocolonialism. The postcolonial thinkers like Bhabha are much more problematic in the sense that they de-historicize and depoliticize the postcolonial discourse. Bhabha's celebration of the depoliticized "third space" resembles the stance of the West as an objective knower whom Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" identifies as the "concealed subject" who "pretends it has no geo-political determinations."⁴⁴

The Transnational (Non)Polarization: Who is Developing Whom?

To expose the uneven politics of polarity in cross-national level, I would show how the development discourses and environmental justice discourses also make people first enthusiastic and later confused and deceived in their appreciation of Western neocolonizers' strategy of violence in the name of cross-cultural affiliation. Just after Hilary Clinton's visit in Bangladesh, Bangladesh bought four Lockheed Martin C-130Es at the cost of \$180 million from the United States.⁴⁵ The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified the US Congress on May 22 of 2012:

The sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by enabling the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) to use its C-130 fleet to respond more capably to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief needs in the region and support Bangladesh's significant contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, and support operations to counter violent extremist organizations.⁴⁶

If I scrutinize the rhetoric, the DSCA is concerned about "enabling" Bangladesh to work for the national security of the US and also to serve the US's business interests in the Middle Eastern oil reserves. Ban-

gladesh is made to buy these cargo planes, investing a huge amount of the taxes of the common people, ignoring a popular demand by the people at the same period of time; Bangladesh, by spending only 36 million dollars, can “enable” her state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Company Limited (BAPEX) to extract oil from the Bay of Bengal without any help from US oil companies like Shell, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips. It is often argued that BAPEX cannot successfully extract oil. But a quick glimpse of facts would tell us a different story.

To reflect on the present situation of energy sector management, natural gas in Bangladesh was first discovered in 1955 in Haripur.⁴⁷ Since then 22 gas fields have been discovered. These gas fields are divided into 23 blocks. The North-Eastern zone of Bangladesh is very rich in natural gas resources. The undiscovered gas resource ranges from 8.43 TFC (95% probability) to 65.70 TFC (5% probability). Growth of domestic consumption tracks the growth of dynamic production of natural gases. Overall growth rate of consumption is increasing 7% per year over the last several decades.

In 1993-94, eight blocks were handed over to multinational corporations and, in 1997-98, another seven.⁴⁸ Before signing Production Sharing Contracts (PSC) with US companies, BAPEX and Petro-Bangla solely continued all the research and development work on the energy sector. In this time the rate of exploration and utilization was sufficient. A simple example can prove it. BAPEX dug out 19 fields and declared success in 10 cases, while multinational corporations like Cairn, Oxidental and Naiko dug out 36 fields and succeeded in ten cases. So, BAPEX and Petro Bangla were more efficient than other companies.

The rhetoric of the US-Bangladesh partnership and friendly bond may attempt to hide the neo-colonialist drives of the US by manipulating Bangladesh’s economic interests. A quick check of some facts would reveal it. It is often believed that the US is helping Bangladesh in her infrastructure development as the US provides loans from time to time, but the fact is that Bangladesh pays taxes to the US that amounts to four times the loans the US provides to Bangladesh. Bangladesh in the last six years bought gas from Chevron, paying 160 million US dollars, whereas, by employing the state-owned company BAPEX, Bangladesh could extract and use the same amount of gas, spending only 20 million US dollars.

The Role of the US in Climate Change in Bangladesh and Gas Field Explosion

Bangladesh is an undeveloped country, and does not have either the ability or the skills to extract natural gas as do some developed countries—these simplistic assertions just don’t hold. The best example is provided by the Magurchora and Tengratila case tragedy.⁴⁹ Oxidental and Naiko combined have wasted 500 billion cubic feet of gas in an explosion caused by undertaking a wrong but cost effective method to extract gas in their bid to manipulate cheap labor in Bangladesh. Ninety acres of land were destroyed in Magurchora due to the explosion. BELA (Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association) estimates the damage to be worth 100 million dollars. Naiko eventually paid out \$525,000 in compensation to about 620 families who were affected by the disaster, and another \$100,000 for planting trees, which is only 0.65% of the total damage.

In addition, 16% of land in Bangladesh is under threat of being wiped out from the map due to global warming. The human factor that is mainly responsible for global warming and sea level rise is burning of fossil fuels. Miller states that, 75% of the human caused emissions of CO₂ since 1980 are due to fossil fuel burning.⁵⁰ The two largest contributors to current CO₂ emissions are the world’s thousands of coal burning power and industrial plants and more than 700 million gasoline-burning motor vehicles (555 million of them cars). Emissions of CO₂ from US coal burning power and industrial plants alone exceeded the combined CO₂ emissions of 146 nations, which contain 75% of the world’s people.⁵¹ As a small nation, Bangladesh plays a negligible role in greenhouse gas emission. According to National

Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPA) per capita CO₂ emission in Bangladesh is 0.2 ton per year.⁵² But the figures for developing countries, world average, industrial world, and United States of America are 1.6, 4.0, 6.0 and 20.0 tons respectively, and the US is solely responsible for 23% of the total yearly fossil-fuel carbon emission to the atmosphere. In contrast, Bangladesh contributes a minuscule 0.06%.⁵³

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to sea level rise, as it is a densely populated coastal country of smooth relief comprising broad and narrow ridges and depressions.⁵⁴ The World Bank showed 10 cm, 25cm and 1 m rise in sea level by 2020, 2050 and 2100; affecting 2%, 4% and 17.5% of total land mass respectively.⁵⁵ Milliman et al. reported 1.0 cm per year sea level rise in Bangladesh.⁵⁶

Bangladesh is asking for compensation from countries responsible for global warming, but no positive response has been received so far. Recently, the United States announced on May 24, 2012 to provide a total of US \$13 million grant to Bangladesh for dealing with the adverse impact of climate change.⁵⁷ Out of the amount, \$9 million would be for the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF). The grant would come through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) over the next four years as announced by the US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton during her recent visit to Bangladesh.⁵⁸

But if we compare this with the economic manipulation by corrupted political leaders and American oil companies as in the case of NAIKO's compensation, this emerges as eyewash to foreground the US as holding the flag of justice.

Conclusion

Bhabha's concepts like hybridity, mimicry, sly civility, the pedagogical, the performative, and others provide certain tools for cultural negotiations and self-representation within a fast-evolving world. In this evolution and "flattening" of the world, however, all minoritarians are not equally capable of making the best use of tools and tactics offered by Bhabha. The article has shown that these "weapons of the weak" favor certain relatively privileged minoritarians at the expense of abandoning the "bottom billion" and the most impoverished people from the global South.⁵⁹ Social theories like the one of hybridity must be evaluated across multiples sites of contestations. The present article has thus examined the transnational cultural, literary, economic exchanges and others and finds that Bhabha's theory of hybridity aligns with the conservatives forces with a façade of progress.

Interestingly, Bhabha himself has acknowledged that his notion of hybridity has been misused by neoliberal multiculturalists.⁶⁰ But I have argued that such an acknowledgement is not enough since his hybridity with its multiple tools and tactics has intrinsically been disempowering for the minoritarians from the very beginning. As social critics, we are left with this: either Bhabha must radically revise these notions, or we keep rejecting them.

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